



Newsletter for East Lothian Countryside Volunteers

June 2017

June already! And we've even had some proper warm weather. This has been wonderful for those of us that like insect spotting, with recent weeks finally providing (amongst other things) bumblebee, butterfly and moth sightings. We've also had a bit of proper rain and that has allowed the vegetation to spring in to action and increasing numbers of flowers to come in to bloom. That of course means that our vegetation surveys must soon begin and rusty plant knowledge be oiled back into action. A busy time. In the coming months I'd like to trial some 'out of hours' self-led volunteer sessions. From dealing with invasive plants to monitoring wildlife, this will be an opportunity to visit new sites and contribute to tasks that rangers just don't have time for. It will also allow those with commitments that get in the way of weekday volunteering events to get involved. **Please let me know** if you're interested and we can work out when, where at what tasks will be most suited to the group.

Conservation Volunteer tasks scheduled in June:

New faces always welcome! If you would like to join in with a group for the first time, please get in touch with the relevant ranger to confirm details.



Battling Hogweed and winning!
© Sarah Hannis

1st June Yellowcraig Dave; dwild@eastlothian.gov.uk

15th June Path Warden team task Nick; nmorgan@eastlothian.gov.uk

18th June Aberlady John; jharrison@eastlothian.gov.uk

27th June North Berwick Sam; sranscombe@eastlothian.gov.uk

27th May Levenhall Nick; naitken1@eastlothian.gov.uk

28th June Dunbar CVs Tara/Laura; dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk

Upcoming events for volunteers!

All welcome. For more details or to secure a place, please send me an email.

June, July, August – dates tbc. Wildlife recording and/or short (1-2hr) practical conservation tasks at sites around the county. Mixture of evening, weekend and weekday sessions, depending on volunteer's availability. Tackling Himalayan Balsam, mapping Hogweed, removing Ragwort are some of the requests for help so far. E-mail me if interested in coming along, stating any preference for time and place.

24th August – Archerfield Walled Garden. Meet the head gardener for a tour of the garden and take a walk around the estate with Dave Wild. Tea and coffee provided!

25th August – Rockpooling in Dunbar with Tara. A morning playing in the pools, followed by fish and chips on the beach.

October – Fungal Foray in Gifford with Sam

Quiz (or similar) night: So far only a few replies. Please get in touch if you are interested in some sort of evening / social event (suggestions welcome!) and it shall be arranged.



There's an invasive plant in your neighbourhood;
Who ya gonna call?
Gus and Ali!
It's something strange and it don't look good...
Who ya gonna call? etc etc

Keeping one step ahead of Pirri Pirri at Yellowcraig © Abbie



Azure Damselfly© Abbie

Volunteer activity during May

Removing Giant Hogweed from the Tyne ©Sarah H

Above: Junior Rangers make short work of Ragwort on North Berwick Law. Below 'Senior' volunteers do their bit to....



Painting signs at Aberlady © Abbie

Sabre Wasp© Abbie



New signage at Aberlady!© Abbie

We had a display at the Foxlake festival.. This is what those helping looked like at the start of the day...

Please send in ideas or content for the next 'Best boot forward' to kbaird@lothianmail.net
Apologies for any omissions, inaccuracies and typos.

Who's who

This month – it's all about me. But just the bare bones, none of the juice (as if). If you fancy sharing a bit about why you volunteer, your favourite places, wildlife and any anything else I'm on the hunt for future Who's whos.

Don't be shy – you can choose the questions (and even make up the answers!)

Name: Katty Baird

What do you do: volunteer, help volunteers volunteer, hunt for moths, enthuse about spiders...

Where do you volunteer? Mostly Yellowcraig, but I sporadically turn up in North Berwick and extremely rarely at Aberlady. Also 'do' bees and plants for the grazing project on sunny days.

Length of service: Started volunteering for ELC when I moved to East Lothian in 2011

Brief career: Not sure I've really had a career yet, but in amongst the usual stuff, highlights have included discovering some leaf litter toads in Tanzania, Pike fishing in Angus, NZ flatworm charming in Edinburgh, beating grass tussocks in Speyside and blasting the mouthparts off aphids in Birmingham. Since then the business of real life has taken over and I've combined child rearing with a few ecological contracts, an unfeasible quantity of voluntary work and more recently too much time underground. But I've met some lovely people, seen some beautiful things and had a lot of fun in the process.



Why do you volunteer? It's an excuse to spend time in nice places, learn new things, hang out with interesting people and maybe even do something useful. And it keeps me away from domestic drudgery (as anyone who's had the privilege of seeing the inside of my house will realise)

Favourite place in East Lothian: My recent obsession with East Lothian moths has led me to lots of places I never knew existed, which are particularly peaceful or stunning (or both) at dawn – absolutely the best time of the day to be outdoors. Canty Bay is possibly my local favourite, further afield some of the Lammermuir cleughs.

Favourite place in the UK: North West Scotland. But I'm also fond of 'rural' east Surrey where I spent a happy outdoor childhood exploring woods, playing in streams and discovering wildlife for myself. Despite roads, buildings, people there are still some peaceful wild places to be found.

Favourite wildlife? Almost anything without a backbone. The variety and number of bugs that can be collected by sweeping a net through long grass or the array of moths that come to a light trap left over night is just incredible. They are there all the time of course, we just don't notice them. Amazing colours, shapes, ways of life... definitely worth closer scrutiny.

Where would you like to visit next? I'll go anywhere I'm taken! But would probably choose somewhere at high latitude and/or high altitude, and without too many people.

Wildlife you'd most like to see? So much I'd like to see so I'll limit this to Scotland. (And it would be possible to see any of these in East Lothian too, which would be really special.)

Mammal: Orca. Bird: Goshawk. Insect: Chinese Character (it looks like a bird poo).



The unmistakable Chinese Character moth uses visual mimicry to avoid being eaten. When at rest the wings are held steeply over the body which combined with a white, brown and grey wing pattern means it closely resembles a bird dropping. Other animals, including caterpillars and spiders also pretend to be bird droppings to reduce their chances of being eaten by hungry birds. Not a great protection from many dogs I know though.

Bolton to Gifford walk - 20 May

by LC

On 20 May, path wardens Maxine and Graham Pettigrew led a delightful walk along the core path from Bolton to Gifford.

We stopped first at Bolton churchyard, to look at the memorial to numerous members of poet Robert Burns' family. These include his brother Gilbert, who was factor to the Lennoxlove estate, and their mother Agnes Brown.

The path first crosses a burn, then travels between fields and a wood, before splitting in two around the remains of Colstoun Old Mill. The public right of way takes the eastern route, while the other path dips into a magical glen along the Colstoun Water. Shaded by trees dressed in fresh spring leaves, the river flows rapidly between banks rich in wildflowers.

En route, Graham showed us repairs he had made to the path, while Maxine pointed out wildflowers. These included bitter vetch, bugle, comfrey, crosswort, forget-me-not, lady's smock, red campion, speedwell, water avens, and of course wild garlic.

Some people came along having seen posters in libraries and were meeting others for the first time, making for a pleasantly sociable outing.

Details of future walks can be found on the 'events' section of the East Lothian Volunteer Path Wardens website <https://pathwardens.wordpress.com/>

Maps of East Lothian's core paths can be found on http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/379/countryside_and_wildlife/1264/core_paths.



Maxine points out Water Avens along the route

Duncan is going walkabout

In the middle of June our intrepid Duncan is setting off on a very long walk in the Pyrenees. We wish his legs and feet well, hope he doesn't tire of his own company too quickly and look forward to hearing all about his adventures on his return (August).

In the meantime if you have something urgent that needs a rapid response and which you would normally email to Duncan, please contact Neil nclark@eastlothian.gov.uk instead.



These are the legs doing the walking. Hope the footwear choice is better

Wildlife Recording Workshop

Words by Lesley K; Photos by Sarah H

A group of volunteers, with varying interests and levels of experience, attended the Introduction to Wildlife Recording Workshop at Levenhall. This workshop was run by Natalie Harmsworth, Senior Ecologist at The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC).

During the morning session, after discussing different reasons for recording wildlife, we were introduced to the 4 Ws; Who, What, Where and When, the essential elements to every record. These were discussed in detail, with some practical exercises covering reading grid references from OS maps and the appropriate level of grid reference precision according to species or type of organism. Does a bird in flight require a 10-figure grid reference and how useful is a 4-figure grid reference when you're reporting an invasive plant species?

Natalie walked us through what happens to records after they are submitted, a process of validation and verification, and how they are then uploaded and imported into central databases. More information about how the data is used and how it can be accessed can be found at:

http://www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/recording_contributing.php.

After lunch, we went outdoors to practice taking records in the field. Armed with maps and a few field guides, we were introduced to the numerous members of the daisy and pea families. We thoroughly investigated the verges of the path, learning about stipules, florets and mucronate tips. We were distracted by a pair of Reed Bunting, a couple of Common Carder bees and a particularly speedy caterpillar, later identified as a Timothy Tortrix. Thank you to Natalie for a very informative day.



The group doing some botanising, a Timothy Tortrix moth caterpillar (named after the type of grass it likes, rather than somebody called Tim) and some admirable notebook-keeping.

Dawn Chorus Walk

There were two Dawn Chorus walks led by Duncan at Amisfield and John at Gosford. Many thanks to both for getting out of bed to share their bird expertise with us. Here is a summary of the Gosford walk by Sarah Hannis, along with some of her stunning photos.

The birds were up and singing already as we assembled at 5am for the Dawn Chorus walk. We set off for around the Gosford Estate near Aberlady in beautifully calm, clear conditions. John helped us to identify the sounds of the birds around us - many more species than I expected, so it was quite slow progress, especially as they were all singing at once! We stopped to hear goldfinches, a blackcap, blue tit and blackbird within just a few paces of the start. Round the estate we heard goldcrests (they sound like a squeaky wheel), a treecreeper, wood pigeons ("take two spoons Betty") wrens, pheasants, a song thrush... etc. We also heard a woodpecker drumming and saw a couple of great tits scoping out a hole in the base of a tree just by the path in front of us. As we walked around the lake we saw several herons, swans and noisy greylag geese as the mist over the lakes slowly lifted and turned gold as the sun rose.



Sam on the North East side of the Law and a rather nice Puss Moth resting on a grass stem.

Lights on the Law *by Katty*

Like last year, you may have noticed bright lights shining in unusual places at night. If they come on at dark, stay on all night and don't move, they are likely to be one of my light traps for surveying moths. North Berwick and Traprain Laws, various coastal sites, woodlands... I go almost anywhere! The bright lights attract moths which fly into a bucket trap where they can rest unharmed until morning. At dawn species in the trap are counted before being released unharmed. As well as seeing lots of beautiful moths close up, surveys provide information about which species are where and how this is changing over time. If you'd like to come along to see the moths in the morning, or fancy borrowing a trap to see what is in your own garden, then drop me an email kattybaird@gmail.com to fix something up.



South of Scotland Eagle Project

An exciting new project is being launched later this year to help boost Golden Eagle populations in South Scotland. Opportunities for volunteers will be available! The project is summarised below but for more details check out www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk

Project co-ordinator: Dr Cat Barlow RSPB cat@langholminitiative.co.uk

- Partnership project aiming to reinforce the population of Golden Eagles in the South of Scotland
- It will involve translocation of Golden Eagle (immature birds) to boost the existing population
- Planned start Autumn 2017

Options for volunteers will include:

- Recording sightings.
- Helping monitor watch out for released eagles
- Eagle champion – assisting project staff in spreading the word about the project.
- Assisting with community events, educational activities
- Collecting eagle food (need a strong stomach for this)
- Helping to feed the eagles in the aviaries.

Photo ©Laurie Campbell



SWIFT SURVEY



Swifts are in trouble. Their breeding numbers have plummeted in the last 20 years. Take part in a simple Swift survey to help find out more about where they nest. As well as providing more details of our local populations, this information can be used by local planners, architects, ecologists and developers to provide mitigation to protect breeding swifts during building development.

What to look for: Watch out for screaming groups of swifts flying at roof-height (that means they're breeding nearby), or where you've seen swifts nesting - perhaps entering a roof or hole in a building.

When to look: The best time to look is around dawn or dusk in warm still weather during June and July

More information and to submit records: <https://emisapps57.erm.com/Rspb/Home/Index>

The Great European Nurdle Hunt

2nd - 5th June 2017

Nurdles are plastic pellets about the size of a lentil (2-3mm). They are used by industry to make many of our plastic products. Accidental spillage can lead to them being lost to the environment, and many end up washed up on beaches...

To help gather more evidence about just how widespread the nurdle problem is, why not join in with the **Great European Nurdle Hunt** taking place across Europe at the beginning of June?

Here's how:

Pick a beach. Any sandy beach will do! Keep a close look-out for nurdles, and record what you find. We'd like to know:

1. Where you were searching
2. How many people were hunting
3. How long you were hunting
4. How many nurdles you found

For full details and to enter your findings, visit

<http://www.nurdlehunt.org.uk/euronurdlehunt.html>



The Scottish Spider Search

The search for spiders continues. This month the spotlight is on the Zebra Spider - a charismatic species which is very likely to be out and about on a sunny wall or rocks near you!



Known as the Zebra spider because of its smart black and white pattern, this is a type of Jumping Spider. As the name suggests, they are excellent jumpers and catch their small prey by an ambush and pounce approach; no fancy web spinning required! To help home in on this prey they have superb vision, with two large forward-facing eyes that are capable of focussing, and (arguably) give them rather a cute appearance. There are a further six, smaller eyes positioned around the head to impart near 360° vision, ideal for spotting the prey and evading capture themselves.

Where to look: Try sunny walls and fences in your garden, or other peoples! I've found them on North Berwick Law and the old wall at Yellowcraig. They are great spiders to just watch as they run about in search of prey. So position yourself by some sunny rocks, try to stay awake and see what you can spot (there will be plenty of other bug life to see). And please send your Zebra Spider records in to the Scottish Spider Search!



Left a female and below a male sporting some rather large and cumbersome-looking jaws. Mostly for show of course.

Photos taken a few weeks ago at Gala Law near Aberlady
© Katty



Full details of the Scottish Spider Search can be found on The Wildlife Information Centre's (TWIC) website where you can also submit your records.

www.wildlifeinformation.co.uk/scottish_spider_search.php

Hibernating Herald Project: end of season summary

In a manner just slightly reminiscent of young teenage children in the morning, at the time of writing there are still a few Herald moths reluctant to rouse themselves from hibernation. The cave they are in is just too comfortable perhaps. Nevertheless, by mid-May the majority had upped and left to mate, lay eggs and ultimately die. Their caterpillars will spend the summer feeding on Willows before pupating to become adult moths and seek out hibernation sites to spend the winter. Perhaps then, now is a good time to take stock of what the Hibernating Herald survey has found so far and to plan next season's adventures...

For those unaware, Mark Cubitt and I (with help from others across Scotland) spent the winter checking mines, caves, old buildings and drains to map the overwintering distribution of the Herald moth and try to find out a little more about their hibernating habits. New discoveries were made: for a start Heralds are far more numerous and widespread in Scotland than previously believed. Excitingly another UK moth, The Tissue, was discovered overwintering in Scotland for the very first time. In fact during the winter a total of 31 Tissues were found hibernating in 11 different locations but the first one, and arguably the catalyst for the whole project, was spotted in East Lothian.

The Hibernating Herald survey has shown how much information can be gathered with targeted searching by lots of people (the power of 'citizen science'!). Local bat groups, HES and other groups have also joined in, demonstrating the value of sharing access, expertise and information. But perhaps most importantly of all, exploring dark underground places has been fun. Thanks to everybody who has been involved so far.



Far left: all dark places, no matter how small are worth a closer look. Left: In several locations clusters of heralds were found clinging to roots and each other. Below: previously Heralds were generally thought to mate after emerging from hibernation. Presumably most do, but we found several pairs "in cop" in their hibernation sites at the end of April and in May.



The Hibernating Herald project in numbers:

- Number of hibernating Heralds recorded: **2011** (compared with just 1450 known records in Scotland up to the end of 2016)
- Number of Heralds found hibernating in East Lothian: **508**
- Number of locations with hibernating Heralds: **172**
- Highest number of Heralds hibernating in one place: **171**

The Hibernating Herald survey will resume in the Autumn – there are plenty more places to check and it will be interesting to see if Heralds return in comparable numbers to the places that they hibernated in last winter. I'm hopeful for more Tissue locations too.

Visit our facebook page [@hibernatingheralds](#) to read about our antics so far and be kept informed of how you can get involved later in the year.

QUIZ TIME!

Name that Moth

This issue is unashamedly turning into a moth issue. Here are some recently caught East Lothian moths. Can you match the picture to the names below?



Scorched Wing
Brimstone Moth

Streamer
Lunar Thorn

Shears
Green Silver-lines

A-Shears; B-Green Silver-lines; C-Streamer; D-Lunar Thorn; E-Brimstone Moth; F-Scorched Wing



Where in EL?

Where is this East Lothian landmark?
Answers in next issue of BBF. Photo by Liz.

Volunteer's photos

A butterfly by Andy B, some flowers by Liz and a bird by Abbie. Can you name any of them? Answers below.



Green-veined white – a mating pair; Leopard's Bane; Greater Stitchwort, female Stonechat